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SIPDIS

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FOR SA/INS

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SUBJECT: OFFICIAL INFORMAL NUMBER 016 (02/03/04)

Classified by Ambassador Jeffrey J. Lunstead for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

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- SRI LANKA NATIONAL DAY

MALDIVES POLITICAL SITUATION

11. (C) FYI. Ambassador Lunstead met Feb. 3 with Minh Pham (Amcit -- strictly protect), the head of the UNDP in the Maldives and a long-standing Mission contact. The wide-ranging discussion touched on a number of issues, including the newly created Human Rights Commission (as mentioned in Colombo 181, the UN is providing some funding for the commission) and the latest on the LDC matter, which we reviewed in Colombo 186.

12. (C) Of particular import, however, were Pham's remarks on the political situation. As discussed by the Ambassador and Maldivian Deputy Foreign Minister Shihab in their February 2 meeting (see yesterday's o/i note), Pham confirmed that the report into the September 2003 prison violence had just been published. (Pham actually said two reports had been published, one on the death in custody of the first prisoner and the other on the prison violence that followed in which other prisoners were killed. We are trying to find an English-language translation of the reports.) He said the reports made clear that the initial prisoner death had been by torture and that the prison guards had overreacted to the subsequent prisoner unrest by shooting some prisoners in the back. Pham said the GoRM had cleverly issued the reports just before the week-long Eid holiday to defuse things, but he expected Maldivians to be buzzing about the report when the holiday ends. Pham also noted that the name of an NSS official implicated in one of the reports, but then redacted out by the GoRM, had leaked out. This individual, he said, had been beaten up last week. Pham added that there was a disturbance in Male' recently when a man, possibly related to Gayoom, began yelling anti-Gayoom slogans outside the presidential palace. This individual apparently garnered quite a crowd. Overall, Pham felt that tensions in the Maldives were on the rise and it was not clear whether or not the GoRM was showing the ability to manage the situation, but it did not look promising. Pham's remarks confirmed our sense of the problems in the Maldives reviewed in Colombo 164.

13. (SBU) The Ambassador will host a U.S. National Day reception in the Maldives on Feb. 26. He will use that visit to check on the political temperature of the country. (POL)

SA/RA JOHN SCHLOSSER VISIT

14. (U) We are sending out country clearance for John Schlosser's Feb. 25-28 visit to Sri Lanka, per State 22435 request. As noted above, the Ambassador will be away in Male' for at least some of John's visit, but DCM Jim Entwistle will be here. Poloff Andrea Tomaszewicz will serve as control. We will send out a notional schedule soon and avidly look forward to the visit. (POL)

SRI LANKA NATIONAL DAY

15. (U) Tomorrow, Feb. 4, is Sri Lankan National Day and Mission will be closed. The Ambassador, who enjoys the hot Equatorial sun, will enjoy the day off after attending the 3-4 hour national day ceremony and parade! (Both the PM and the President will be present -- it will be interesting to see their body language. Of course the Ambassador also gets to go to the President's reception that same evening.

LUNSTEAD